

Parents' Forum Minutes –16th January, 2014

PSA (Jo Lovatt):

Jo raised the issue of birthday parties and playdates and how over the years parents have asked about the etiquette around primary school socialization. Those present agreed that some aspects of play-dates and birthdays do cause anxiety, namely children with physical special needs sometimes feeling excluded; children without older siblings or who have not been at nursery may not be aware of the concept of play-dates; parents and carers may feel concerned about accepting play-date as this would mean reciprocating and thus others seeing "the state of their home"; parents or children may feel excluded if they are not invited to play-dates or birthdays. Suggestions were for Jo to perhaps put together a brief introduction/guidance to play-dates and birthdays; play-dates could be held in neutral territory e.g. a park; year reps in nursery and reception could help in disseminating these ideas and guidance and perhaps facilitate play-dates for those who for various reasons feel left out. With regard to birthdays there was an overwhelming feeling that it is not always possible to invite everyone and that is why the school encourages marking the day with a small offering in the school. However, it is also commonsense, that if the birthday is small it would be better NOT to give invitations out in the playground or through school. It is also good practice to be open about the fact that the birthday party is small.

Communication (Reception Blossom)

Would it be possible for parents to be informed by text or email if their child's class teacher or teaching assistant is to be absent and where possible the name and likely duration of the replacement? Several parents had fairly describe fairly cryptic messages from their children, e.g. "We had a new teacher today, he wrote his name on the board, I can't remember what it was"... or describe their children as being apprehensive about returning to school with an unfamiliar teacher. If parents were aware of some of the situation they could better decipher their children's confusing messages and also be able to reassure them that the teacher absence is only temporary.

Mr Cornelius sympathised with parents, however, he explained that it is not always feasible to communicate this in a timely manner. The reasons are multiple, the school may have had very short notice themselves; the reason for the absence may be sensitive; the school may not know the details of the supply teacher; and at any given time there may be more than one absence and supply teacher. Where an absence is planned or prolonged they endeavour to communicate in a timely fashion. Where possible they try and get the same supply teachers that they have had a good experience with and that usually there is a TA around which provides continuity and familiarity for the children.

Choir (Yr4)

What happened to the choir? The children really enjoyed it and it seems to have disappeared?

Mr Cornelius and the leadership team will look into why this has happened and see if there is space in the timetable to reintroduce the choir.

French homework (Yr4 & Yr6)

I loved that Yr4 & 6 got French homework this week. Can we have French homework every-week or 'most' weeks, in addition to normal class homework? It would emphasise the importance placed on languages and support one language class a week, which may be insufficient.

The leadership team agree and will look add French to the subjects that can be given as homework. It would not be every week as there are other subjects that need to be covered, but at least with some regularity.

Coats (Yr3)

Is there any way, that during wintertime, teachers make sure that children go out properly dressed? Some parents have commented on children playing without coats at playtime.

Mr Cornelius explained that by year 3, children are encouraged to become independent and to make sensible choices. Moreover, there are playground monitors and if children are inappropriately dressed for the weather conditions, they will request the child to wear a coat. In conditions of extreme cold or other extreme weather conditions the children do not play outside.

Access to nursery (nursery)

Can something be done about access to the nursery? It is difficult to get through in the mornings. Is it possible that the reception classes can congregate away from the gates?

Mr Cornelius agreed that this not acceptable and he suggested that the school will identify an area set back from the entrance where the reception children should queue in an orderly way and that the teachers would take them in once the bell rings at 8.55. Congregation around the gates will be discouraged.

Vanishing Hoodies (Yr 2& 5)

There seems to be a trend at our school for these valuable hoodies to go walk about. Is there a way to avoid this? Can we print names in the back as footballers do? Are there any other suggestions as to how we can combat the problem, as they aren't a cheap part of our school?

Mr Cornelius acknowledged that unfortunately this can be a problem with more expensive items of the school uniform and is difficult to tackle. However, the decision to introduce the hoodies was part of the process of making the PE kit smarter and more uniform. Evidence has suggested that this creates a sense of pride and discipline which then feeds into sportsmanship. Perhaps, the recent success Grove Park has had in team sport with other schools is a reflection of this. Unfortunately names on the back can be expensive and would prevent the hoodies being available as second hand school uniforms, which many parents and carers rely on. The best compromise would be to encourage parents to label the inner sleeve or another part of the hoodie with fabric pens or iron on labels that cannot simply be cut off, and are readily made visible.

After School Clubs for the infants and junior years (both receptions and Yr1s)

There was a mad rush and queues from before eight for the clubs before Christmas. This was very stressful to say the least. Is it possible to sign up for the whole year? Or for people who are already doing it to get priority? For example, there can be a waiting list and people can drop out and any extras can take their places. Many parents make their childcare decisions depending on whether they are in the clubs or not so it is important for parents to plan their whole year. It would also be useful for parents to know how oversubscribed they were as we are all stressing for possible no reason if all the places weren't filled anyway. These problems will only become worse with the expansion.

Vicky explained that after school clubs have to be made available on a termly basis and that the option of annual registration for classes is not acceptable. The purpose of after school clubs is to provide a taster of a variety of activities that children may not normally access and thus enable them to choose areas that they may want to pursue more pro-actively. There was a strong feeling that first come, first served was impractical for many parents who cannot queue from early in the morning and are therefore disadvantaged. Several options were suggested as alternatives to make the process fairer, including all applications coming in and then there being a lottery; having an online application service; and for oversubscribed clubs giving the first choice to those children who missed out in the first term. Online applications worked well in the past and so were considered a more acceptable option than queuing. Schools cannot use lottery systems and so that is not an option that can be adopted.

Continuity of after school clubs (Yr1&Yr2)

Is there a way we can give those already committed to a class first refusal on places, otherwise there is no continuity and kids don't make sufficient progress to get properly enthused'. This was a particular problem with ballet. Some children who started in the first term didn't get a place in the front of the queue and so were not able to continue. Parents invested in the ballet kit and so both kids and parents were very disappointed.

As above, schools must offer after school clubs on a monthly and cannot do so on an annual basis.

Age appropriate after school clubs (Reception, Yr1 & Yr2)

Given the expansion is it possible to split some of the clubs into age appropriate classes, separating out the years and running several parallel or back-to-back clubs? This is thought to be appropriate for Ballet and maybe it is an option for other popular clubs?

One problem has been that although clubs are oversubscribed, there has never been enough for a whole new class. However, there is scope to encourage Aktiva to perhaps introduce other clubs as with more choice there will be less pressure on some clubs. Grove Park is new to Aktiva and so constructive feedback will help improve the service.

Clubs communication from Aktiva (Yr4)

Despite this being raised last term, communication remains poor. Some of us never received timely confirmation of the clubs. This can cause issues with planning after school care. It also does not provide time for undersubscribed classes to be re-advertised. Can this be fed back to them?

Vicky agrees that this has been the case and will continue to feed this back to Aktiva.

AOB

The issues of food running out at lunchtime has not resolved since it was raised in the forum before Xmas. Mr Cornelius explained that this he is aware and it will be resolved this week. The school will be arranging another food tasting for new parents.

Next Parents' Forum will take place on the 20th of March, 2014